

King: We Believe

Rights leader's son backs assassin's claim of im

By Michael Dorman
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

In a nationally televised confrontation laden with high drama, a son of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. flatly asked James Earl Ray yesterday: "Did you kill my father?"

Ray, appearing thin and frail from a deadly liver ailment, replied, "No, I didn't."

Dexter King, 36, told Ray, "I believe you, and my family believes you."

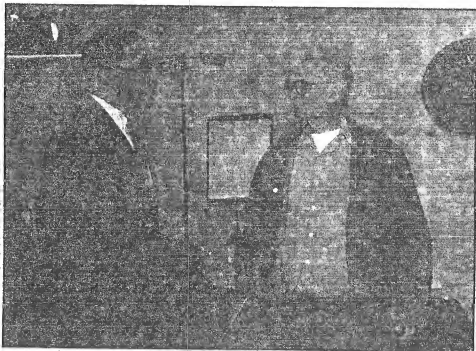
The meeting came before a room full of reporters and television cameras at the Lois DeBerry Special Needs Center, a prison hospital in Nashville, Tenn., where Ray is serving a 99-year sentence. He pleaded guilty in 1969 to the assassination of King but now is seeking a trial — claiming he was a mere dupe in the murder.

His meeting with Dexter King was the latest development in the case in recent months.

King and his family revealed last month that they were supporting Ray's appeal for a full trial. But they said at the time that they did not know whether Ray was innocent or guilty. King's statement yesterday that he and his family believed Ray's claim came as a sharp departure, which King did not explain.

Ray, 69, is awaiting the results of a court hearing last month in which his attorneys pressed for a full trial.

He was brought to the room yesterday in a wheel-



Dexter King, son of Martin Luther King Jr., with James Earl Ray after meeting yesterday.

chair. He seemed to ramble at times and stumble over his words. At the outset, Ray told King: "I had nothing to do with shooting your father." But then, and later in the meeting, he added qualifications to his denial, telling King, "You'll have to make your own conclusions," and that the question of his guilt was "hard to answer."

King told him: "We are going to do everything in

our power to will prevail. way our des and that of tied up together a family thar tions answer

Many qu have been After the 1969 phis, Ray p handedly mu he was spar tence and g Then he rec said he was man known in a conspira er, he refine Raoul actual participating ever produce Raoul exists.

Physical ev ed directly t owned the n fingerprints other finger traceable to was known-h

leader before the assassination

But at yesterday's meeting King and Ray's lawyers, Ray information has been spread

"The only thing that should of the case," he told King. "your own conclusions. I think don't think it could be done t

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